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ABSTRACT

This study examined the social and cognitive competence of immigrant preschool children in France. A total of 25 immigrant (Maghreb) children and 25 nonimmigrant French children age 4 and 5 years participated in the study, which compared their cognitive abilities, adaptive behaviors, play abilities, and success in the first year of elementary school. It found that the immigrant children received lower scores than the nonimmigrant children in all four areas. The results suggest that children from an immigrant background seemed to "cognitivize" more than nonimmigrant children the adaptations that define the social intelligence. For nonimmigrant children, these cognitive processes were heavily mobilized in learning situations and were much more in action in applications of practical intelligence. Possible cultural and linguistic biases of the instruments used to measure cognitive abilities and adaptive behaviors are also discussed. (Contains 50 references.) (MDM)

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5th European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education
"What should be the education objectives for early childhood education (0--7 years) ?"

ED 389 467

Socio-cognitive abilities of children between 4-5 years of age coming from immigrant families

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Summary

This study focuses on the social competence of children between 4-5 years of age, from the middle section of nursery school and whose family is immigrant (Maghreb).
A group of 25 children was structurally matched according to age, sex and to the socio-professional background of the head of the family with a group of 25 autochthonal children. Each child went through four evaluations : a) Evaluation of its cognitive abilities (K-ABC : knowledge and mental processes). b) Evaluation of the level of its adaptive behaviors (Vineland ABS). c) Evaluation of the abilities needed for play activities in the schoolyard. d) Previsional evaluation, done by the teacher, of the child's success in the first year of elementary school.
1. The global results show that the performance of children issued from immigration are inferior to that of the autochthonal children.
2. A factor analysis done on each group, reveals a cognitive organisation of the social competence. It permits to isolate two factors. 1) A factor of practical intelligence (social conformity). 2) A factor of social intelligence (negotiation and share of significations). Both of those common factors guarantee the conceptual pertinence of the socio-cognitive ability notion. Besides, they differentiate the two groups : the cognitive processes evaluated by K-ABC are preferably used by the social intelligence (immigrants) or by the practical intelligence (autochthones).

Key words : socio-cognitive abilities. Play behaviors. K-ABC. Vineland. Immigrants.

Cette recherche porte sur la compétence sociale d'enfants de 4-5 ans scolarisés en moyenne section de l'école maternelle et issus de familles immigrées (Maghreb).
Un groupe de 25 enfants est apparié sur l'âge, le sexe et la catégorie socioprofessionnelle du chef de famille avec un groupe de 25 enfants issus de familles autochtones. Chaque enfant fait l'objet d'une quadruple évaluation: a) Evaluation de ses compétences cognitives (K-ABC: connaissances et processus mentaux). b) Evaluation du niveau de ses comportements adaptatifs (Vineland ABS). c) Evaluation des compétences qu'il mobilise au cours de ses activités ludiques observées dans la cour de récréation. d) Evaluation pronostique par l'institutrice de sa réussite en cours préparatoire.

1. Les résultats globaux montrent que les performances des enfants issus de l'immigration sont inférieures à celles des enfants autochtones.

2. Une analyse en axes principaux effectuée sur chaque groupe révèle une organisation cognitive de la compétence sociale. Elle permet de dégager 2 facteurs. 1) Un facteur d'intelligence pratique (conformité sociale). 2) Un facteur d'intelligence sociale (négociation et partage de significations). Ces deux facteurs communs garantissent la pertinence conceptuelle de la notion de compétence socio-cognitive. Ils différencient par ailleurs nos deux groupes: les processus cognitifs évalués par le K-ABC sont mobilisés de préférence par l'intelligence sociale (immigrés) ou par l'intelligence pratique (autochtones).

Mots clés: Compétences socio-cognitives. Jeux. K-ABC. Vineland. Immigrés.

Introduction

In a larger sense, competence may be defined as an adaptation capacity : "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment" (White, 1959). It is this capacity which enables human beings to confront daily unexpected, problematical and changing situations.

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Social competence may be "behaviorally defined" (Edmonson, 1974). The *adaptive behaviors* guarantee personal and social autonomy of a person. These behaviors are learned, they change with age and they are defined according to norms and values of one's own adherence culture (Sparrow & al., 1984). Therefore, these behaviors reflect the social conformism of who show them (Oppenheimer, 1989). Hence, to the description of the social competence we must add all those behaviors that demand negotiation, such as construction in common and share of significations (Bruner, 1991).

We can also describe the social competence as a group of *socio-cognitive skills* that an individual shows in his behavior. They give him a certain knowledge of the situation and the power to act upon it. "This is why most of the time, the authors show that social competence depends on a *know-how* and obeys to the usage rules that may vary in different situations (De Bonis & Huteau, 1994).

Greenspan (Greenspan, 1981; Greenspan & Granfield, 1992) proposed a model of general competence according to which the practical and social intelligence form the socio-cognitive basis of the adaptive behavior. *Practical intelligence* designates the ability to behave as an independent individual towards daily activities: personal care, work and leisure, use of communal resources. *Social intelligence* designates the ability to plan one's action according to social expectations and on the basis of a more or less relevant interpretation of the behavior of others.

The Greenspan's model gives a theoretical outline which enables us to understand "how normally developing individuals acquire and demonstrate social competence" (Siperstein, 1992). It also permits to understand how social norms are interiorized and how they are reorganized according to an identitary construction (Chombart de Lauwe, 1980; Malewska-Peyre & Tap, 1991). It permits to understand at last how the cognitive processes participate in children's socialization and according to which modalities they interfere in the course of their schooling. Our study focuses on a cross-cultural and developmental perspective (Greenfield & Cocking, 1992). This study aims primarily at describing the organization from the socio-cognitive abilities of children between 4-5 years of age who regularly attend a middle section of a nursery school and who come from autochthonal and immigrant families (Maghreb). Secondly, the study tries to explain the relative inferiority of immigrant children by the specificity of their socio-cognitive organization.

Methodology

Subjects

The group of children (n = 50) who participate in this study belong to a group of three middle sections of nursery schools. The three schools are based in three very different parts of a medium size city (200 000 inhabitants): town center, underprivileged suburb and great suburb. These 50 children constitute two groups: 25 children coming from immigrant families of Maghreb (Group I) and 25 children coming from autochthonal families (Group A). Both groups are rigorously matched according to the following variables: age (variation between 4.2 and 5.3 years, the average age being 4.9 years); sex (each group consists in 10 girls and 15 boys); socio-cultural level whose identification was done thanks to the socio-professionnal category of the head of the family (INSEE, 1992). The K-ABC manual proposes, after analysis of the variance, the following dichotomy: group 1 (farmers, craftsmen, managers, blue collars) and group 2 (executives and intermediary professions). In each group, 23 children belong to group 1 and 2 children belong to group 2.

Procedure

Each child was submitted to four evaluations: 1) Evaluation of its cognitive abilities (K-ABC: knowledge and mental processes). 2) Evaluation of its practical intelligence and its level of adaptive behaviors (Vineland ABS). 3) Evaluation of its social intelligence and the abilities it uses for play activities. 4) Evaluation of the prognostic of success during the first year of elementary school (the teacher's judgment).

1. The *"Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children"* (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1983 and 1993) was conducted on each child. This test was put together in the early 80'ies on the basis of a model for information treatment that distinguishes between simultaneous processes and sequential processes. The simultaneous processes synthesize separated elements into a whole and the sequential processes integrate the information successively, taking a temporal succession into account.

   To both scales, the authors added a "Knowledge" scale that gives a rather precise appreciation of the verbal crystallised intelligence (Kaufman & Kamphaus, 1984), that is to say of the instruction level or of cultural background which the child has at its disposal in situations familiar to it (richness of vocabulary, etc...).

2. The *"Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale"* (Sparrow, Balla & Cicchetti, 1984) is the revised form of the *"Vineland Social Maturity Scale"* (Doll, 1965).

   It studies 11 sub-sets of adaptive behavior gathered in four areas: Communication (COM) / Daily living skills (DLS) / Socialisation (SOC) / Motor skills (MS), this last area being reserved for children under 6 years of age. The scale also gives a composite score (ABC: *Adaptive Behavior Composite*).

   Each of these areas includes items (297 in the *"Survey Form"*) sorted out by order of increasing difficulty, that correctly discriminate children of a given age. Each section is divided into nine periods: from less than a year to 18 years or more).

   The sampling was done on 3 000 representative persons of the American population according to sex, ethnic background, regional situation and the level of parents education.

   The scale construction of the adaptive behavior is based on the same principles as the classical intelligence tests (Wechsler Scales, K-ABC). Each raw score, for a given age, is repositioned in a distribution of an average of 100 and of standard deviation of 15, which from a metric point of view allows the comparison with those same intelligence tests.

   The management of the scale demands the participation of an adult who knows the child well (parent, instructor, teacher). Hence it is a heterovaluation. In the version used for this study, we only kept the discriminant items for ages from 1 to 7-8 years, that is to say 150 questions. The examination has therefore never exceeded 20 minutes. It consisted of a semi-directive conversation with the mother and when her French was not good enough, it was done with the teacher and very often with the help of an older brother or sister.

Two studies done on French subjects (Fombonne and Achard, 1993; Pry and Guillain, 1994) give similar results: it seems that the American norms can be used as such. That is to say, French children, whether of a pre-school age or not, obtain with the Vineland ABS comparable scores to those obtained by American children. This is concluded by Fombonne and Achard for a representative sample of 151 children less than 18 years old, amongst whose 45 were under 6 years of age. This is what we also conclude from the results obtained on a sample of 45 children aged 5 whose stratification criteria for sex, socio-professionnal category of the head of the family and the K-ABC results are very close to the national average sample.

For this study, three scores have been retained: the "communication" score (COM), the "socialisation" score (SOC) and the "daily living skills" score (DLS).

3. *Free play activities*

Each child is observed in its school playground during the 20 minute-long break. Two observers note all activities and behaviors of the child. A synthesis of both observations is compiled later. This synthesis is then analyzed by two other research workers: they the free play activities code according to a scale which can be found below (Table 1). The interrater reliability was calculated with the help of the weighted Kappa coefficient (linear weighting). The reliability criteria conform to those of Fermanian (1984) and of Ciccetti and Sparrow (1981). The average value of Kappa is .76 ("excellent").

The coding scale was prepared from observation scales used by previous researches (Parten, 1932; Smilansky, 1968; Schneider & al., 1993). It has 8 categories of play defined by the combination of two criteria: a cognitive criteria (sensori-motor/symbolic) and a criteria of social participation (solitary/parallel/in group).

Table 1
Categories of play

Solitary play:	
* Sensori-motor	1
* Symbolic	2
Simultaneous or parallel play (similar activities without common aim nor coordination)	3
Group play without cooperation:	
* demanding the sharing of a space or an object (ex: to swing in turn)	4
* to do the same thing together (often by imitation)	5
Group play with supplementary or cooperative roles	
* Motor play (hide-and-seek, building together, chasing, etc...)	6
* Symbolic play:	
* motor play with or without object (ex: pretend to fight)	7
* sociodramatic play (social roles)	8

For each child, we calculate a *"participating"* score to the collective plays (T1). Solitary plays are not accounted for. They can be the signs of a deficient social participation (Parten, 1932); but they can also show a capacity to separate from the group and a form of inaccessible social adaptation for a child under 3-4 years of age. It would then be the simultaneous or parallel plays that would form the inferior level of maturity in a hierarchy of play forms (Moore & al., 1974; Rubin & al., 1976; Smith, 1978).

The T2 score corresponds to the collective symbolic plays. These forms of play mobilize the abilities that are necessary for the emergence and the institution of a social order (Kane and Furth, 1993), but they especially require the socio-cognitive abilities that allow children to build together and to share significations that change, however, according to the taste of their imagination: agreement on the theme, metacommunicative definition of the fictional frame and communication within this frame (Howes, 1985; Verba, 1990; Göncü, 1993).

Parten (1932) emphasizes that we must differentiate an active participation of the child to a group play and its more or less passive or accidental presence in the group. We have therefore added to the participating score, a score (T3) that corresponds to the only collective plays in which the child took an *initiative*.

4. *Teachers' prognostics*

Lastly, each of the three teachers were asked to predict the success of the children still in their class when they are in the first year of elementary school. The evaluation uses a scale of 5 points (Very reserved = 1; Reserved = 2; Average = 3; Good = 4; Very good = 5).

Statistical Analysis

A factor analysis in principal axes was carried out on the 9 variables that are of interest to the evaluation of the socio-cognitive abilities for each of the two groups. For the K-ABC and the Vineland, the standard scores have been retained (M = 100, SD = 15), the children belonging to different age categories. For the plays, we retained the raw scores since we did not have any developmental norms.

Results

1. Descriptive statistics

The results (average, standard deviation) are shown in table 2 below for each of the two groups as well as the significant differences (Student test).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of scores with 10 variables

Variables	"Autochthones"	"Immigrants"	t	Significance
T1 Sum of collective plays	29,600 16,728	25,040 14,653	1,025	n.s.
T2 Collective symbolic plays	14,240 10,982	9,080 10,920	1,666	n.s.
T3 Collective plays "initiated"	14,800 14,280	7,520 8,991	2,157	p<0,05
Communication	90,760 9,554	80,200 11,951	1,992	p<0,05
Socialization	101,080 8,441	91,000 10,607	3,718	p<0,001
Daily living skills	98,520 12,004	88,320 12,944	3,718	p<0,001
Simultaneous	101,960 11,689	92,640 13,413	2,619	p<0,01
Sequential	102,320 13,066	91,080 13,515	2,990	p<0,01
Knowledge	109,120 14,208	83,360 12,480	6,619	p<0,001
Prognostic	3,48 1,085	3,48 1,229	0,048	n.s.

In the group of "Autochthone" children, the average scores to the K-ABC and to the Vineland are very close to those given by the norms, except one concerning the "communication" sub-score. This result could be explained by the fact that in the French version that was used, certain items seem to be very sensitive to the cultural side, especially those concerning the linguistic practices of these ages. Let's take for example item 27 intended for children of 3-4 years of age : "Follow instructions given in the form of : if...then" : ("If your hands are dirty, then you must wash them"), or item 40 intended for the children of 5 years of age : "Use irregular plurals".

In the group of "Immigrant" children, apart from the teachers' prognostic, all scores are inferior to those of the "Autochthones". Of the 10 variables, 7 significantly differentiate the two groups. The three results that do not present a significant difference are those concerning the participation in the collective plays, collective symbolic plays and the prognostic score of the teachers.

Of course, these data approach the question of bias in the psychometric tests (Cole & Moss, 1989). The evaluation of certain minority groups, like the subjects of maghrebin origin, taken from a general population, examines the pertinence of the used tools. This is all the more true as the weak results obtained by these children are in the tests that demand certain linguistic abilities ("Knowledge" of K-ABC and "Communication" of the Vineland).

2. *Correlation Matrix*

In the table 3 below, we presented the intercorrelation matrix of the two groups.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix

"Immigrants"

	T1	T2	T3	COM	DLS	SOC	Seq.	Sim.	Con.
Symbolic plays (T2)	.547***								
Initiated Collective (T3)	.618***	.341							
Communication (COM)	.023	.028	-.061						
Daily life (DLS)	-.102	.194	-.103	.689***					
Socialization (SOC)	-.015	.312	.088	.598***	.612***				
Sequential	.068	.009	.311	.000	.177	-.059			
Simultaneous	.247	-.157	.495**	-.034	-.177	-.12	.404		
Knowledge	.216	.187	.22	.13	.011	-.141	.392	.399	
Prognostic	.126	-.246	.109	.203	-.062	-.176	.444*	.362	.412

"Autochthones"

	T1	T2	T3	COM	DLS	SOC	Seq.	Sim.	Con.
Symbolic plays (T2)	.803***								
Initiated Collective (T3)	.593***	.343							
Communication (COM)	-.11	-.147	-.143						
Daily life (DLS)	.115	-.03	.013	.402					
Socialization (SOC)	-.095	.064	-.426*	.379	-.015				
Sequential	.075	-.045	.195	.416*	.198	.192			
Simultaneous	-.157	-.322	.145	.069	-.136	.221	.237		
Knowledge	.229	.014	.197	.525**	.336	.251	.676***	.483*	
Prognostic	-.06	-.279	.161	.317	.15	-.036	.718***	.409	629***

* p< 05; ** p< 02; *** p< 01

These two matrix are quite comparable for what concerns the intra- and inter-fields coherences.

Generally, we can establish a good intra-fields coherence for both groups : the correlations are positive and most of them are significant on the .05 level. These results relating to the Vineland scale and the K-ABC are consistent with the data of the literature (Sparrow & al., 1984; Kaufman & Kaufman, 1993). There is, however, a certain number of differences between the two groups. The strong coherence that characterizes the evaluation of the practical intelligence (Vineland ABS) for the "Immigrant" children is not found among the "Autochthones" for whom there is no correlation between "Daily living skills" and "Socialization". Reciprocally, the coherence that characterizes the evaluation of the abstract intelligence (K-ABC) for "Autochthone" children is minor for the "Immigrants".

In both groups, the teachers' prognostic is connected to the K-ABC scores and significantly to the score relating to the "sequential processes".

With regard to the inter-fields coherence, three statements can be established :

- the absence of relations, in both groups, between the scores relating to free play activities and those given by the Vineland scale. There is even a significant negative correlation in the group of "Autochthone" children between "Socialization" and initiated collective plays (T3). In fact, all this confirms the results previously obtained (Guillain & al., 1994).

- the absence of relations, in the group of "Immigrant" children between the cognitive and practical aspects of the intelligence (K-ABC and Vineland). This relation is stronger for the "Autochthone" children.

- lastly, the absence of relations between the scores of the K-ABC and those related to free play activities. This can be verified in both groups, apart from a significant positive correlation between the "initiated" plays (T3) and the "Simultaneous processes" that only characterizes "Immigrant" children.

3. Factor analysis

Table 4 below presents the factor matrix after oblique rotation. The prognostic score of the teachers has not been taken into account in the factor analysis.

Table 4
Factor Matrix
Reference structure of the oblique solution Orthotran/Varimax

	"Immigrants"		"Autochthones"	
	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**
Collective plays (T1)	.051	.667	.000	1,081
Symbolic plays (T2)	.383	.377	-.145	.705
Initiated collective (T3)	.000	.821	.040	.565
Communication (COM)	.797	.007	.614	-.15
Socialization (SOC)	.756	-.031	.328	-.175
Daily Life (DLS)	.807	-.102	.316	.067
Sequential	.015	.386	.666	.079
Simultaneous	-.181	.55	.381	-.147
Knowledge	.008	.448	.993	.184
Eigenvalue	2,043	1,922	2,214	2,077
% total inertia	.227	.214	.246	.231
% common variance	.325	.675	.385	.615

After varimax rotation and application of the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue superior to 1), two principal oblique factors are enough to render an account of the correlations observed in each of the two groups.

It is possible to put in parallel the factorial organization of both groups : the eigenvalue, as well as the percentages of the total variance and of the common variance, are similar. In other respects, in the "Immigrant" group, the intercorrelation between the two factors is .014 - it is .039 in the "Autochthone" group.

In the group of "Immigrant" children, the inspection of the variables strongly loaded on each factor permits us to explain the first one as a factor of practical intelligence (it loads the three Vineland sub-scales) and the second one as factor of social intelligence (it mainly loads the results relating to the plays and secondarily the three sub-tests of the K-ABC). The adaptive processes involved in this second factor seem to be somewhat larger than in the first since they associate the modalities of the social intelligence to more abstract cognitive abilities.

In the group of "Autochthone" children, the first factor may be understood as a cognitive factor of apprenticeship or acquisition that mobilizes on the other hand the adaptive processes involved in the "Communication" scale. The second factor is clearly a factor of social intelligence since it only loads the free play activities.

The socio-cognitive organizations that characterize the group of "Autochthone" children and that of the "Immigrant" children are therefore comparable. They also valid the model put forward by Greenspan (1981 and 1992) since they both distinguish the practical intelligence evaluated by the Vineland scale and the social intelligence estimated by the observation of free play activities. But they are not, however, identical since the two components of the general competence maintain different relations with the conceptual or symbolic intelligence evaluated by the K-ABC. In the group of "Autochthone" children, knowledge and sequential and simultaneous mental processes seem to be mobilized by the acquisition of norms and knowledge that are characteristic of practical intelligence (Vineland ABS). Besides, it is the sequential treatment of information that is privileged. In the group of "Immigrant" children, the knowledge and sequential and simultaneous mental processes (K-ABC) seem to be mobilized by the adaptations and negotiations that are characteristic of the social intelligence (free play activities). Besides, it is the simultaneous treatment of information that is privileged.

Conclusion and pedagogical perspectives

The present results reinforce the validity of the "socio-cognitive ability" notion (Pry & Guillain, 1994; Pry & al., 1996). They also permit to distinguish two forms of social adaptation that the literature often qualifies as "practical intelligence" and "social intelligence" (Thorndike, 1920; Guilford, 1967; Greenspan, 1981, 1992). They help describe at last socio-cognitive adaptation modalities that differentiate the functioning of immigrant children from autochthonal children.

This difference mainly resides in the use by both groups of cognitive processes ("conceptual & symbolic intelligence") as they are evaluated by K-ABC. Children from an immigrant background seem to "cognitivize" more the adaptations that define the social intelligence, that is to say, that form of intelligence mobilized in situations demanding a reciprocal adjustment of partners and roles as well as the common construction and the share of significations. For autochthonal children, these cognitive processes are heavily mobilized in learning situations (acquisition and management of knowledge) and they are much more in action in practical intelligence, that is to say, in that form of intelligence mobilized in the construction of a social conformity and in the acquisition of socially valorized behaviors.

It could also be noted that, notwithstanding these results, the teachers' prediction of the success in the first year of elementary school does not make a difference between the two groups. This prediction is, in both cases, strongly associated with, the knowledge acquisition and with the ability to treat information in a sequential way.

The education of children with an immigrant background has instigated, and still does instigate, some few ideological discussion (Basdevant, 1982; Massari, 1985, Boulot & Boyzon-Fradet, 1988; Charlot, 1989). Most of the research made in a differentialistic prospect give results that are relatively convergent: they mainly emphasize the "school failure" of these children (backward pupils and adaptation difficulties) and the importance of the inter- and intra-groups differences (Gratiot-Alphandery & al., 1980; Chauveau & Rogovas-Chauveau, 1990). These researches rest on paradigms, sometimes implicit, which correspond to competing educational models (Isambert-Jamati, 1973; N'Doye, 1987; Boutin, 1988): (1) a "defectological" paradigm that insists on the socio-cultural or linguistic "shortcomings" and which recommend a "compensative pedagogy". (2) a "culturalist" paradigm that emphasizes the conflict of values and the diversity of the educational practices within the family that may prevent or facilitate success at school.

Our results do not permit us to settle the issue but they point in the direction of this differential report: the performance of children of an immigrant background are inferior to that of autochthonal children (K-ABC, Vineland ABS and collective initiated plays). This relative inferiority of the "Immigrant" children seems to correspond to the socio-cognitive organization that characterizes them: (1) the cognitive processes do not concern the standardized aspect of adaptive behaviors and (2) the simultaneous treatment of information happens to be privileged in comparison with the sequential treatment, which is contrary to the requirements of the school system which demands that the child plans its actions and adopts a temporal prospect (Rabain-Jamin, 1989). Indeed, this is really what the teachers seem to think (significant correlation between the success prognostic in the first year of elementary school and the sequential processes).

The nursery school should therefore take into account the specificity of this socio-cognitive organization. But it should especially connect the abstract and the practical intelligence so that the children can "cognitivize" their adaptive behaviors and thereby come to use these socially valued behaviors as a frame or support for the acquisition of academical knowledge.

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